

Introduction

0.1.The Study and its Context:

The study gathers its momentum from the scope of rereading the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Kant from Jürgen Habermas' communicative ethical perspective. It problematizes the interlinking space between the critique of Reason and the ethical patterns which determine them. The study examines three great thinkers who belong to three historical and cultural epochs to fuse them into a common space of concern.

Nāgārjuna, as the great Mādhyamika scholar, makes an effort to refute the essentialism of Abhidhārma, who in his Mūlamādhyamaka kārikācritiqued Reason as knowledge and showed through *reductio ad absurdum* the non-substantiality of the perceived world. Nāgārjuna equates emptiness with dependent origination and argued that phenomena are empty (*sūnyā*), is a classical example of the critique of Reason from a traditional philosophical background.

Immanuel Kant as one of the most influential philosophers in the history of modern Western philosophy, through his 'The Critique of Pure Reason' establishes that the Critique of Reason is the critique of knowledge and the mind plays an active role in constituting the features of experience. He takes up this argument further to tell us that moral values is one that arises from universal principles discovered by practical reason and knowledge in ultimate analysis presupposes moral domain.

Jürgen Habermas is the well-known representative of the Frankfurt school and critical theory. He belongs to the second generation critical theorists. As an engaging interlocutor, he makes the claim to renew and refresh the socio political life more ‘democratizingly emancipatory’ through a reconstruction of the intersubjective and dialogical basis of human engagements through the critique of Reason and thus establishing the ideal of communicative rationality and communicative ethical realm.

0.2.The Scope of the Study

Both Nāgārjuna and Kant have been highlighted as thinkers who significantly altered the courses of philosophy in their time by radically critiquing the notion of reason. When Nāgārjuna uses methodical scepticism to show the limit of theory and reason it reaches the zenith of dialectical critique in India according to some of the commentators. The critique of reason occupies the central stage of engagements in Kant’s thought to deepen the western philosophical categories. Habermas’ critique of Reason attains a civilizational eschewment in reconstructing Reason to invoke communication and ethics together, and to interlink the critique of Reason shared by both Nāgārjuna and Kant according to the domain of their theorization necessities.

Both Nāgārjuna’s and Kant’s critique of reason have been shown as associated with certain definite ethic by quite a number of studies earlier. The Study makes an initial conceptual intervention here by assuming a basic distinction between the ethic (the moral ideals and principles) which is operative behind the critique of reason and ethics as the reflective framework to judge various moral

standards. It also assumes that ethics has a higher role to play as the dialogical-communicative engagement as inspired by the idea of communicative ethics of Jüergen Habermas. It puts forward a claim that it highlights the normative background of the critique of reason/conceptualization/theory formation etc. It presumes further that ‘Ethics’ as the reflective framework that can dialogically/communicatively judge the moral claims, which as a result predetermines the rational-conceptual claims of knowledge. According to the present study, such a reflective framework was dormant or underexposed in the critique of reason in the thoughts of both Nāgārjuna and Kant. Presumably, as such a notion and definitional scope of ‘ethics’ of the critique of reason has been drawn from the idea of ‘discourse ethics’ and critical theory of Jüergen Habermas, the study heads to conceptually compare Habermas’s discourse ethics with the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Kant.

The critique of the ‘centric’ or centralized notion of reason and its delimitation into ‘instrumental’ and ‘purposive-strategic’ rationality that Habermas’s critical theory discusses in detail, emphatically leads it to the theory of discourse ethics/communicative ethics by establishing a reflective relation between critique of reason and ethics. In line with such a notion, the present study invokes the need to take further the critique of reason in the philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Kant against the above said ‘communicative ethical ideal’, to bring them into a contemporary framework of discussion.

Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

0.3. The Objectives of the Study

- The study aims to attain and is on basis of three important objectives:
Rereading of the Philosophies of Nāgārjuna and Kant from the conceptual framework that has been fixed by the study.
- To investigate the possibility of a new conceptual/interpretative account of the relation between ethics, reason and critique.
- To make the study part of a new hermeneutic schema that accommodates the contemporary, modern and pre-modern western and eastern traditions of critical theories on the basis of the suggestive ethical concerns that they share.

0.4. Methodology

The study is both ‘thinker-based’ and ‘concept’ based. It relies mainly on the primary texts of Nāgārjuna, Kant, and Habermas, supported by secondary sources. The inter-textual comparative assessments are intended to be used for the conceptual mediation as informed by the contemporary critical perspective that inspires the study. By contemporary critical perspective, the study broadly means the critical theory of Habermas.

0.5. The Course of the Argument

The first chapter starts with a critical investigation of the nature of thought and critique of reasoning prevalent in the mind of the Buddha, followed by the philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism at large. Nāgārjuna and other Mādhyamika thinkers methodologically determined and theorized the critique of reason to make

it culminate in the concept of *Sūnyatā*. The chapter critically mediates some of the most important textual interventions concerning Nāgārjuna's metaphysics of dialectical criticism, the method he uses for the purpose and also the significant dialectical/critical developments taking place in the fundamental theoretical contents in Buddhist Ontology. The chapter thus makes a metaphysical intermediation into the theoretic claims of dialectical methodological system used by Nāgārjuna in his critique.

The Buddha's philosophical intervention into the domain of the knowledge of the Absolute or *Prajñā* is critical and epistemological. The historical account of the initiation of the critical apprehension on the possibility of *knowledge* starts with Buddha in Indian Philosophical Context. Buddha's critique is the critique of the metaphysics of knowledge as presented in other traditional systems of *pramāṇa* Theoreography¹. Though not a theorist himself, but critique of Speculative Metaphysics, Buddha, obtains a unique manner of dialectical candour which is necessarily ethical and spiritual in nature², i.e., the (method of) dialectic critically transcends all the categories of human cognition and reasoning submerged in the pangs of logical contradictions. Nāgārjuna is a methodological heir of Buddha who belongs to the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna tradition. Nāgārjuna methodologically elucidates the critical claims of the Buddha that could lead to the spiritual as well as intellectual emancipation from the endless cycle of *Samsāra* conditioned by knowledge of speculative order. Unlike Hegel's Constructive Dialectic, the method that he uses is Destructive Dialectic (*Prasaṅga*) and the argumentative methodological tool that he uses is *Sūnyatā* or the concept of Emptiness (of views or categorical conditions of the theoretic mind that forms a

paradigm for itself and uses all the logical means to justify the paradigm). The scepticism of Nāgārjuna doesn't deny knowledge altogether, neither does he deny the existence of the world – the only sceptical demand that the reason follows depends on the relation between the ontology and the metaphysics of experience.

The chapter further discusses the metaphysics of Dependent Origination, argued by Nāgārjuna, particularly in his major text, *Mūlamādhyaṃika Kārikā*. It theoretically elucidates the essential impermanence or *swabhāvo sūnyatā* of the existence of the objects of the world, as a conditional transition and a dependent origination without a static hold on. It is at once both in between being and becoming i.e. neither being nor becoming. It is neither true, nor non-true, neither the conjunction of both, nor the total negation of the either taken together. 'Contradiction' thus becomes the nature of his methodological drive. Nāgārjuna would tell us that a dialectical consciousness is an emancipated consciousness, free from the bondages of knowledge. The chapter discusses how this Dialectic is the awareness of the universal contradiction in reason and destructive dialectic is the only critical means for Nāgārjuna that can set the intellect in the pure realm of non-contradiction, all his arguments as well as the dialectical tools having been dissolved thereafter, as no counter claim is methodologically valid in the Destructive Dialectic.

The second chapter critically analyses Immanuel Kant's clarification of the proper grounds of Reason as a regulative principle not only in the knowledge situation but also in forming the basic principles of practical life. It investigates the basic idea of the relation between his metaphysics of experience and metaphysics

of morals. It is on this ground Kant establishes the critique of human reason as the ultimate regulating principle of both pure and practical functioning, with the aid of *a priori* categories and principles of systematization, and the principles of practical life and duty. The intention of Kant, when he makes the critique of Enlightenment, is not only to set the determining grounds of Reason as principle of understanding but also critically clarify Reason's function that does not transcend its limits.

The crux of the critique of reason in Kant has its causal links with the foundation of convictions of the Enlightenment with which it started as well as the causes leading to its failure. The fundamental problem with Kant regarding Reason is that it determines the scope of Reason in cleansing its way of all sorts of pseudoscientific or constructive determinations³ that the Enlightenment reflects as the cause of its self-destruction. Kant's metaphysics starts with a critical investigation of knowledge as 'knowables' that determines the function of Reason under some categorical and transcendental functional conditions that make Reason a regulatory condition aided by the *a priori* conditions of systematization of knowledge. Thus the ideas of pure reason are not constitutive but only perform a regulatory function. The transcendental nature of these regulatory functions is further elucidated by Kant in his clarification on the relation between metaphysics of experience and metaphysics of morals: that Kant regards the teleological necessity of these ideas of pure reason in the practical life.

The chapter, thus, aligns more with the ideal of practical Reason further. Reason, not only accommodates the regulative grounds of knowledge proper, but also incorporates the principle of practical reasoning under the matters of pure faith

in God, immortality of the Soul and Freedom. For Kant the *transcendental a priori* knowledge is possible only under the practical circumstances that necessarily become the pre-conditions of phenomenal knowledge proper along its universal principle of systematization and emancipation.

The third Chapter bring to the fore the Habermasian engagement with the critique of reason and the welding of it with the ethical domain/ discourse ethics. The chapter attains it by situating Habermas as the second generation thinker of the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School stands in a critical relationship to Hegel and Marx. The chapter discusses the Habermasian critique of reason along with and against the Frankfurt School as he pronounces that in Marx there is the dissolution of dialectic into sheer positivism. “Habermas attempts to recover the epistemological dialectic in Marx by developing a theory of cognitive interest.”⁴ Cognitive interest for Habermas is a moral domain that regulates the bridging principle of theory and practice through a discursive engagement among free individuals under the theoretic criteria of Communicative Ethics. As Scott Warren says, Habermas considers the goal of a critical theory to be an essential aspect of the “self-emancipation of mankind guided by the process of self-reflection.”⁵ And for that, “What Habermas wants to do is to reinterpret the concept of the “interest of reason” (a cognitive interest) materialistically so that the emancipatory interest is contingent upon and embedded in the development of life processes of interaction and work. All of this is intended to demonstrate the necessity of recovering the dimension of self-reflection in which reason grasps itself as interested”⁶. Therefore, by discourse ethics, Habermas means: “...anyone who seriously undertakes to participate in argumentation implicitly accepts by that very understanding general

pragmatic presuppositions that have a normative content. The moral principle can then be derived from the context of these presuppositions of argumentation if one knows at least what it means to justify a norm of action.” The principle of universalization, as Habermas tells, is “a validity that extends beyond the perspective of a particular culture, is based on a transcendental-pragmatic demonstration of universal and necessary presuppositions of argumentation.”⁷ .

The fourth chapter redeploys the problematique of the thesis, i.e., the ethics of the critique of reason, through the topology of destructive dialectic of reason, the practical reason and its critique of pure reason and the communicative reason’s critique of non- communicative forms reason, as they project a regulative and reflective domain of ethics and morality. The method of Nāgārjuna’s Dialectic dialectics as destructive dialectic or *Sūnyatā* which is for Nāgārjuna a skilful means to derive a critical constant pertaining to the nature of things. It leads us to recognition of the true nature of things as above the contradictions of both emptiness and non-emptiness and beyond a theory of emptiness which is the constructed knowledge to give way for the ‘perspective-less’ perspective of *karuṇā*. Similarly, The teleological structure of Kant’s critical philosophy is prudent to construct the purposive-ness of Reason, i.e., that which brings into account the practical sphere of rational life, regulates the cognition or provides pre-requisites for the purpose and also accommodates the *justified beliefs* of moral concern that forms the postulated grounds of human action.

Habermas’ undertaking is, in a sense, to complete the basis for a critical theory of society by going beyond the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse to demonstrate the epistemological foundations as social theory which releases

Reason from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy and theory of communication. A theory communication, for Habermas, demands a critically reconstituted reason (communicative) that presupposes the moral domain and communicative ethics.

Towards the conclusion, the Study presumes that over and above this ‘modernity-specific’ concept of Reason, historically Reason has been equated with Knowledge. Critique of Reason, as a result addresses the universal as well as the ultimate claims of knowledge, which however is culture specific. Just as Ethics becomes a reflective exercise for recognizing contextual moralities, Reason becomes an effort to mediate local knowledge with its universal claim. Therefore, the prime concern of the study assumes transference from ethics and critique of Reason to the Ethics of Critique of Reason and it, highlights ethics of critique of Reason in the sense assumed here foregrounds an ethical domain as that which presupposes Reason.

The study assumes a synchronizing hermeneutic in this context, which opens the hermeneutic circle of ‘*Prajñā-Karuṇā*’, ‘practical reason- morality’ and ‘knowledge-communicative ethics/the communicative moral domain’. This interpretative endeavour of the study has been framed in form of an ‘Intercultural-Cross-Cultural’ understanding of the critique of Reason which engenders Understanding as Knowledge as inspired by and along with the Habermasian engagement of the critique of Reason which conjoins in a commendable way with a reflective framework that suggests that the moral domain that activates the critique of reason in the thoughts of Nāgārjuna and Kant and thus cuts across the ancient and the traditional to the modern and the contemporary to propose a synchronizing hermeneutic.

Notes and Reference

¹Theoretic history of the traditional cognitivist systems like Nyāya etc.

²T.R.V. Murthy characterizes 'dialectic' as a self-conscious spiritual movement.

3. Paul, Guyer, (2006); *Kant*; London, Routledge. P. 157

⁴Warren Scott, (1984); *The Emergence of Dialectical Theory: Philosophy and Political Inquiry*; University of Chicago Press. p. 161

⁵Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.p.165

⁷ Jürgen, Habermas, (1990); *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*; Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber NicholSEN; Cambridge, Polity Press. p.116